DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 112 SP 027 468

AUTHOR Dunwell, Robert R.
TITLE Merit, Motivation, and Mythology.
PUB DATE 27 Feb 86
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (Chicago, IL, February 26-March 1, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Merit Pay; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Morale; *Teacher Motivation; Teacher Persistence; *Teacher Salaries

ABSTRACT

Five myths about teachers' attitudes regarding merit pay are discussed. The first myth, "Teachers favor merit pay," contrasts with several findings from studies and surveys which indicate that teachers generally do not favor merit pay. Myth number two, "Money is a motivator--more money produces more work," is also argued against with the help of research studies that indicate that money motivates some people in some circumstances. The third myth states that "Merit pay will persuade highly qualified people to enter and stay in teaching," but the paper posits that teachers do not enter teaching to make money; teachers are not particularly satisfied with the salaries they make, but do not leave teaching primarily because of low salaries. "Merit pay promotes competition and competition promotes excellence" is the fourth myth, but the paper asserts that greater competition will not produce excellence in education and that greater cooperation probably will. In response to myth number five, "Motivating teachers is a simple matter of offering an extrinsic reward," the document presents research findings which indicate that needs, need satisfaction, and motivation vary from one individual to another and that merit pay could actually depress an individual teacher's intrinsic motivation. (CB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
1986 Annual Meeting
February 27, 1986
Chicago, Illinois

Merit, Motivation, and Mythology

Robert R. Dunwell
Professor of Educational Leadership
The University of Texas at El Paso
El Paso, Texas 79968

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. R. Dunwell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

All Rights Reserved 1986

SP027468

Merit, Motivation, and Mythology

Robert R. Dunwell

Introduction. Arguments over merit pay for teachers have been around since the early 1900's (Kapel, 1985; Lieberman, 1985; Dunwell, 1984; Darling-Hammond and Wise, 1983; Schneider, 1983; Weldon, 1971) . However, one of the major differences between earlier discussions and the present concern appears to be that merit plans have become politically important at the highest state and national levels with non-educators taking the lead (Kapel, et al., 1985)(emphasis added). Witness the support for merit pay by the House Committee on Education and Labor (1983), the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), and the Secretary of Education (Bell, 1985). Obviously, this kind of support has produced a dramatic acceptance. In 1984, fifteen states had performance-based incentive programs under development, six other states had mandated the development of such programs, and seven states had passed legislation to develop statewide career ladder programs (Cornett, 1985)(See Footnote 1 for a list of these states).

Although every career ladder plan seeks to promote excellence in job performance, some are merit-based; others combine performance and extended hours or extended contract years; still others are based on teachers assuming additional or differentiated duties (Cornett, 1985). In contrast, true merit pay is a reward system which attempts to base salary on performance and defines the reward in dollar terms, although the rewards could include sabbaticals, tuition assistance, or other bonuses (Committee on Education and Labor, 1983). The basic idea of merit pay is that some teachers get paid more than others for performing the same kind of work but at a higher level of skill and competence (Castetter, 1986; Lieberman, 1985) -- not more work or

different work (Uzell, 1983; Barber and Klein, 1983).

Myths About Merit Pay.

What is it that gives the notion of merit pay for teachers so much public acceptance? Some have suggested that the public believes teaching to be a relatively simple job that is simple to evaluate, believes the public schools are staffed by lazy and incompetent teachers, believes that merit pay is a cheap method to motivate teachers (English, 1986; Barber and Klein, 1983). There are at least five other major myths which need to be dispelled.

Myth No. 1 — Teachers favor merit pay.

The title of a recent article in no less than the American School Board Journal proclaimed "Our Nationwide Poll: Most Teachers Endorse the Merit Pay Concept" (Rist, 1983). Actually, the researchers found that nearly two of three teachers surveyed agreed with the statement that "teachers who are more effective in the classroom should receive larger salary increases than teachers who are less effective." While only 17.6 % of the sample supported the current system of basing salary increases on seniority and academic credentials alone, 41 % said that they would want "classroom effectiveness" to be given equal weight in determining salary increases. But, only slightly more than 3 % said they would want "classroom effectiveness" to be the sole standard for salary increases (Dunwell, 1984).

Gallup's 1984 survey of 2,000 teachers revealed that, although 76 % of the sample felt there were teachers in their school who were sufficiently outstanding to warrant merit pay, 64 % of the sample were opposed to merit pay, because they felt it was difficult to give a fair evaluation, and because they felt it would create morale problems among teachers (Gallup, 1984).

The fact? Generally, teachers do not favor merit pay.

Myth No. 2 — Money is a motivator — more money produces more work.

Rebore poses the one question fundamental to any pay system, "Does money stimulate an employee to put forth more effort?" and concludes "that money definitely affects performance under certain circumstances (Rebore, 1981)(emphasis added). When minimum necessities have been satisfied, the motivational value given material incentives is extremely limited and almost entirely dependent on the creation of the attitude that individuals ought to want material things (Barnard, 1938).

However, money is also symbolic; it can represent almost anything an individual wants it to represent; and, it can mean whatever people want it to mean (Rebore, 1981; Hersey and Blanchard, 1982). Hence, money has varying degrees of importance to individuals depending on their backgrounds and experiences (Rebore, 1982). Barnard states that it is fallacious to believe that the attitude of employees toward management is governed primarily by economic motives (Barnard, 1938). Hersey and Blanchard conclude that "...money, the old reliable motivational tool, is not as almighty as it is supposed to be, ...(even) for production workers" (Hersey and Blanchard, 1982, pp. 40-41). And Frase, Hetzel, and Grant believe "that the major reason for failure (of merit pay) has been (the) basic assumption -- that money serves as an effective motivator" (Frase, Hetzel, and Grant, 1982).

The fact? Money motivates some people in some circumstances.

Myth No. 3 — Merit pay will persuade highly qualified people to enter and stay in teaching.

Will merit pay really do that? It will if money were a primary reason

for becoming a teacher, or lack of money a primary reason for becoming dissatisfied with teaching or leaving teaching. However, a 1983 study found that "...the most frequently given reasons for entering the teaching profession were... (1) service...(2) working with students...(3) generally liking to work with people... (and) (4) participating in the development of children" (Bredeson, Fruth, and Kasten, 1983, p. 54). A 1984 study found teacher burnout was related to need deficiencies in teacher motivation, especially "...those higher level need deficiencies affecting job satisfaction (self-actualization, esteem) rather than...the lower level need deficiencies associated with job dissatisfaction (autonomy, security)" (Anderson and Iwanicki, 1984, p. 128)(emphasis added).

Nevertheless, teachers themselves state that they think that the primary reason teachers are leaving is because of low salaries (Gallup, 1984). But, "...only a few former teachers identified money as an important factor in their personal decisions to leave, and several explicitly noted that money was not the reason" (Bredeson, Fruth, and Kasten, 1983, p. 56)(emphasis added). Teachers, former teachers, and administrators concurred that low salaries were a major disadvantage; however, money was not perceived as a major source of job dissatisfaction. In fact, low salary was subordinate to other issues such as geographic location, personal freedom in the job, and the nature of the job itself (Bredeson, Fruth, and Kasten, 1983). And, although those teachers who said they had seriously considered leaving teaching cited salaries and working conditions as the biggest reasons, the possible actions they judged least helpful were "...basing pay on performance (merit pay) and paying extra for added responsibilities (career ladders)...." (Brandt, 1985, citing The 1985 Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher).

The facts? Teachers do not enter teaching to make money; teachers are

not particularly satisfied with the salaries they make; but, teachers do not leave teaching primarily because of poor salaries.

Myth No. 4 — Merit pay promotes competition and competition promotes excellence.

Combs calls the notion that ours is primarily a competitive society a myth. "Actually," he states, "we live in the most cooperative, interdependent society the world has ever known" (Combs, 1979, p. 15). Sergiovanni calls the notion that competitive incentive systems are motivating a misconception and asserts that you do not find this kind of competition "...reflected in the management practices of successful business firms" (Sergiovanni, 1985, p. 6).

Sergiovanni asserts that competition (1) breeds isolation and de-emphasizes the intrinsic rewards derived from work itself or from work-related social interaction with colleagues, and (2) makes teachers dependent on "...managerial inspection and accounting rather than internal discipline and self responsibility" (Sergiovanni, 1985, p. 7).

Combs asserts that competition as motivation works only if we believe that "...of necessity, someone must win and someone must lose" and then "...only for the people who believe that they can win" (Combs, 1979, p. 166). He identifies the results of competition as (1) the destruction of feelings of trust in ourselves and others, (2) fear of other people, (3) discouragement and dissillusionment among the people who feel they do not have a chance of winning, and (4), when competition becomes too important, a break down of morality and the acceptance of any means to achieve desired ends (Combs, 1979).

The fact? Greater competition will not produce excellence in education; greater cooperation probably will.

Myth No. 5 -- Motivating teachers is a simple matter of offering an extrinsic reward.

The greatest appeal and the greatest flaw of merit pay is that it is a terribly simple answer trying to cope with a terribly complex problem. Merit pay mentality is dominated by what English calls the "myth of the unitary profession" (English, 1984). Indeed, a merit pay plan for teachers would be effective only if enough teachers were motivated by the "merit carrot."

Maslow's classic motivation theory insists that we must take into account a great many other factors. A satisfied need no longer motivates; however, the fulfillment of a need is dependent on the individual's perceptions and experiences. In fact, some individuals never feel that their basic needs have been fulfilled. For any individual, the satisfaction of even basic needs is possible only when certain preconditions exist. And, further, the hierarchical structure functions within the context of an environment that is only relatively stable. Simply, individuals change, conditions change, needs change, the degree of need satisfaction changes, and motivators change (Maslow, 1970; Goble, 1970).

Earlier, Barnard stated "...the scheme of incentives is probably the most unstable of the elements of the cooperative system..." and "...the willingness of any individual cannot be constant in degree" (Barnard, 1938, p. 85 and p. 158). A 1980 study of motivational differences among teachers and administrators reported (1) a variation of psychological needs based on teaching level (secondary, junior high, elementary), age, and sex, (2) significant differences in security need deficiencies based on race, sex, and position, and (3) differences in the fulfillment of desire for achievement, mastery, prestige, and recognition between whites and non-whites (Chisolm, Washington, and Thibodeaux, 1980). In fact, Wilkerson warns "...the present

meritocratic system tends to confirm cultural biases about race, sex, and other factors unrelated to intelligence rather than challenge them" (Wilkerson, 1982).

The most powerful motivational forces for teachers are a complex of intrinsic rewards including "...seeing students learn and succeed, believing one's job service to others is important, and being able to continue growing personally and professionally" (Bredeson, Fruth, and Kasten, 1983). Hawley points out that "...teachers neither rank pay particularly high as a source of motivation nor value upward mobility as much as they used to" (Hawley, 1985). And DeLamarter warns that external reinforcement, which merit pay may well represent, reduces the effect of any intrinsic motivation that is present (DeLamarter, 1980).

The facts? Needs, need satisfaction, and motivation varies from one individual to another; teachers are individuals who have developed strong intrinsic motives; merit pay could actually depress an individual teacher's intrinsic motives.

Summary and Conclusions

Schneider asserts that the "...empirical evidence and research data seem to be consistent....(however) the evidence against merit pay is not conclusive" (Schneider, 1983). The House Committee recognizes "...mixed and inconclusive results with performance-based pay in the private sector and in education...." (Committee on Education and Labor, 1983).

If we agree that the two most critical problems now facing the teaching profession are: (1) the lack of teachers with quality educational backgrounds, and (2) the lack of career incentives sufficient to retain the most talented teachers, then we must agree with English's conclusions that "...merit pay as

simple performance pay (does not pose) a realistic solution" (English, 1984, p.73). Even the House Committee concluded that "...those who view merit pay as some easy, inexpensive, painless method of solving the nation's education problems are not realistic." But, is merit pay, as they suggest, "...one of many pieces in a puzzle..."? (Committee on Education and Labor, 1983).

Merit pay may be one piece of the puzzle. But, if it is, hopefully it will not come until we have dealt with all the other recommendations of the House Committee on Education and Labor (1983) — after we have imposed higher standards for those entering the profession, after we have granted higher pay to beginning teachers, after we have increased the budget for teacher education, after we have allocated funds for faculty growth and development, sabbatical leaves, summer institutes, and other inservice training, after we have addressed school discipline and violence problems, after we have improved the work environment for teachers, after we have restructured teacher supervision, and after we have developed criteria and evaluation models for both teachers and administrators.

Merit pay is an idea whose time has not yet come.

Footnotes

1. States reported to be developing performance-based incentive programs: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

States reported to have a mandate to develop such programs: Deleware, Kentucky, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Dakota, and West Virginia.

States reported to have passed legislation to develop statewide career ladder programs or pilot projects: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Missouri (Cornett, 1985).

Bibliography

Anderson, Mary Beth G., and Edward F. Iwanicki, "Teacher Motivation and Its Relationship to Burnout," Educational Administration Quarterly, Vol. XX, No. 2, Spring 1984.

Barber, Larry W., and Karen Klein, "Merit Pay and Teacher Evaluation," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 65, No. 4, December 1983, 247-251.

Barnard, Chester I. The Functions of the Executive. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938.

Bell, Terrel H., "Peer-Review Model for Managing Systems of Performance Pay," Education Week, March 14, 1985.

Brandt, Ron, "Prerequisites to a More Rewarding Profession," Educational Leadership, Vol. 43, No. 3, November 1985.

Bredeson, Paul V., Fruth, Marvin J., and Kasten, Katherine L., "Organizational Incentives and Secondary School Teaching," The Journal of Research and Development in Education, Vol. 16, No. 4, 1983.

Castetter, William B. The Personnel Function in Educational Administration. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing company, 1986.

Chisolm, Grace. B., Roosevelt Washington, and Mary Thibodeaux. Job Motivation and the Need Fulfillment Deficiencies. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, 1980. ERIC Document No. ED 188 044.

Committee on Education and Labor, U. S. House of Representatives. Merit Pay Task Force Report. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1983.

Cornett, Lynn M. "Trends and Emerging Issues in Career Ladder Plans," Educational Leadership, Vol. 43, No. 3, November 1985.

DeLamarter, William A., and Krepps, Patrice E., Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Reinforcement: The Role of Task Interest. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Montreal, September 1980. ERIC Document No. ED 193 584.

Dunwell, Robert R., "Merit Pay: Issues, Not Answers," The Baylor Educator, Waco, TX: The College of Education, Baylor University, Winter 1984.

English, Fenwick. "Merit Pay: Reflections on Education's Lemon Tree," Educational Leadership, December 1983/January 1984, 72-79.

Frase, Larry T., Robert W. Hetzel, and Robert T. Grant, "Promoting Instructional Excellence Through a Teacher Reward System: Herzberg's Theory Applied," Planning and Changing. In Klein (ed.), 1983.

Gallup, Alec, "The Gallup Poll of Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Public School," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 66, No. 2, October 1984.

Goble, Frank. The Third Force. New York, NY: Grossman Publishers, Inc., 1970.

Hawley, Willis D., "Designing and Implementing Performance-Based Career Ladder Plans," Educational Leadership, Vol. 43, No. 3, November 1985.

Hersey, Paul, and Kenneth H. Blanchard. Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources. Englewood Cliffs, NJ:Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982. Fourth edition.

Kapel, David E., Stanley Mour, Betty Lou Whitford, Matt Benningfield, Terry Brooks, and Joseph Liedtke, "Linking Career Ladders with Demonstration Schools: A Proposed Cooperative Model," Journal of Teacher Education, Vol. XXXVI, No. 3, May-June 1985.

Klein, Karen (ed.) Merit Pay and Evaluation. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa, 1983.

Lieberman, Myron, "Educational Specialty Boards: A Way Out of the Merit Pay Morass?" Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 67, No. 2, October 1985.

Maslow, Abraham. Motivation and Personality. New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1970. Second Edition.

National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk: An Imperative for Reform. Washington, DC: The Commission, April 1983.

Rebore, Ronald W. Personnel Administration in Education: A Management Approach. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982.

Rist, M., "Our Nationwide Poll: Most Teachers Endorse the Merit Pay Concept," The American School Board Journal, Vol. 170, No. 9, 1983, 23-27.

Schneider, Frank, "Merit Pay for Teachers," in Klein (ed.), 1983.

Sergiovanni, Thomas. "Teacher Career Ladders: Myths and Realities in Implementation," Teacher Education & Practice, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1985.

Uzell, Lawrence A., "Where Is the Merit in New Merit Pay Plans?" Education Week, Vol. III, No. 2, September 14, 1983.

Weldon, Lynn L. Conflicts in Our Schools. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1971.

Wilkerson, Margaret B., "The Masks of Meritocracy and Egalitarianism," Educational Record, Vol. 63, No. 1, Winter 1982.